DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 302 SP 018 460

AUTHOR Pitkoff, Evan
TITLE Teacher Participation in School Decision Making.
PUB DATE 19 May 81
NOTE 23p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; *Decision Making; Faculty Mobility; *Job Satisfaction; School Administration; *Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Participation; *Teacher Role

ABSTRACT

Current literature on teacher participation in school decision making was investigated. While research findings were found to be at times contradictory, some general conclusions about teacher participation are drawn. Teachers are not homogeneous in their preferences for participation in school decision making. Many teachers feel decisionally deprived; relatively few feel decisionally saturated. The relationship between decisional discrepancy state and satisfaction appears to be curvilinear with equilibrium as the most desirable state. The type of decision to be made is an important factor in determining whether teachers want to become involved in the decision making process and whether they will derive satisfaction from the experience. Teachers tend to desire involvement in the decisions that are most relevant to them as teachers. The amount of time and work that will be required of them are major concerns of teachers when they consider whether or not to become involved in school decision making. The leadership of the principal in shared decision making seems to be important for the success of such involvement. (JD)

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# Teacher Participation in School Decision Making

Evan Pitkoff
E65.2097
May 19, 1981

SP 018 460

## Teacher Participation in School Decision Making

Many studies of businesses have indicated the positive results of employee participation in the decision making process. Bridges (1967) has stated that studies in educational settings have indicated that teacher participation in school decision making does "increase a teacher's level of satisfaction in teaching, his enthusiasm for the school system where he works and his positive attitudes toward the principal."[1]

In a school district where a teacher participation model was utilized Crockenberg and Clark (1979) reported that nine out of ten teachers believed teacher involvement would "enhance their effectiveness and produce important benefits for students."[2]

Griffith (1979) stated that staff participation raises morale yielding better decisions and policies which are easier to implement.[3] This is particularly true for curriculum development activities.[4]

Griffith further stated that the majority of school superintendents and school boards want teachers to participate in school decision making.[5] Possible explanations for this can be found in the works of Keef (1979) who indicated that "the lack of teacher involvement in decision making is inversely proportional to negotiations" at the bargaining table,[6] Mulder (1971) who suggested that by "by allowing subordinates to participate in decision making, superiors gain influence over the actions of individual role players,"[7] and Griffiths (1959) who postulated that "an administrator's effectiveness is inversely proportional to the number of decisons he personally makes concerning the affairs of the organization."[8]

It would appear that teacher participation in school decision making is often desired by superintendents, school boards, and teachers. Although Isherwood and Taylor (1978) found that teacher participation in school decision making was not related to the satisfaction of principals,[9] in some cases increased teacher participation may also be beneficial for the principal. For example, Isherwood and Taylor found teacher participation to be a "good vehicle for developing better relationships between the school's teachers and the school principal."[10]

Furthermore, Griffiths has postulated that if the administator confines his behavior to making decisions on the decision making process rather than on making decisions for the organization, his behavior will be more acceptable to his subordinates and the decisions made will be more effective.[11]

Because of all the potential advantages for all concerned, Keef has suggested that "common sense seems to indicate that participatory decision making is an idea whose time has come."[12] The purpose of this paper is to investigate the current literature on teacher participation in school decision making.

A classification scheme for participation in organizational decison making has been devised by Alutto and Belasco (1972.)[13] Twelve decisional situations were identified (see table one.) Subjects in two Western New York school districts were presented with a questionnaire survey in which they were asked to indicate whether they currently participated in each decisional situation and whether they wished to participate. The absolute difference between actual and desired participation scores served to categorize

teachers into three groups: those who participated less than they desired were characterized as being in a state of decisonal deprivation; those teachers who participated more than they desired were characterized as being in a state of decisional saturation; and those teachers who participated as often as they desired were characterized as being in a state of decisional equilibrium.[14]

Alutto and Belasco then compared teachers' decisional participation classification with many sociological variables. They found that the decisionally deprived tended to be young and male, whereas the decisionally saturated tended to be old and female. Furthermore, the decisionally deprived tended to:

> be working at "secondary levels, employed in the rural district, perceiving highest levels of role conflict and possessing the most favorable attitudes toward collective bargaining, strikes, and unions. In addition the decisionally deprived perceived the decisional control to be residing at top administrative levels and desired that both principals and superintendents be given lower degrees of influence. On the other hand, teachers experiencing decisional saturation tended to"...(work at) "elementary levels in the urban district, perceiving moderate levels of role conflict and possessing moderately unfavorable attitudes toward collective bargaining, strikes, and unions."[15]

When interpreting the results listed above it should be cautioned that the variables were not tested in isolation, that is, many of the variables may have been highly correlated to each other. For example, male teachers tend to work at secondary levels whereas female teachers tend to dominate in elementary schools. Furthermore, it was not predetermined if there were differences between the rural and urban school district subjects on these variables independent of decisional participation state.

The Alutto and Belasco study did not indicate the degree of the teacher's desire to participate nor the degree of the teacher's perception of their actual decisional participation; the results indicated only the discrepancy between desired and actual states in terms of the number of decisional situations. They found 57% of the teachers to be decisionally deprived, 24% to be in decisional equilibrium, and 19% to be decisionally saturated.

Conway (1976) stated that "rather than dealing with the highly confusing and subtle distinction of types or modes of participation, (Alutto and Belasco) allowed the respondents to define the terms for themselves."[16]

Conway used a Likert-type scale to measure the degree to which teachers were participating as well as the degree of their preferred state of decisional participation in the school, instead of the yes-no format used in the Alutto and Belasco study. Conway pointed out that in the Alutto and Belasco study a respondent's preference in some decisional areas and lack of preference in other decisional areas could erroneously lead to the categorization of that respondent as being globally in a state of decisional equilibrium. The Likert procedure used by Conway maintained this "cancelling out" aspect of the Alutto and Belasco study, "But allowed for differences in degree of deprivation or saturation that might not totally cancel."[17]

Conway found the largest proportion of teachers to fall within the decisionally deprived category and the fewest to fall within the decisionally saturated category.[18] These results not only agree with those obtained by Alutto and Belasco

but also shows decisional deprivation to be even more widespread than Alutto and Belasco did.

Best (1975) conducted an investigation similiar to that of Alutto and Belasco, but with added equilibrium dimensions; active decisional equilibrium, which included teachers who were participating and wanted to be participating, and passive decisional equilibrium, which included teachers who were not participating and who did not want to be participating.[19] Whereas Alutto and Belasco found most teachers to be in a state of decisional deprivation, Best found many to be in a state of decisional deprivation but most to fall within the decisional equilibrium categories. Furthermore, most teachers who fell within the decisional equilibrium categories were in active equilibrium.[20] (See table two.)

Best identified 12 decisional situations[21] and provided decisional discrepancy scores in each of the decisional situations. The decisional situations which resulted in the highest percentage of teachers in decisional equilibrium were 1) making textbook selections and 2) resolving student's academic or personal problems. These situations seem relevant to the teacher's job. The decisional situations for which the fewest teachers reported being in a state of decisional equilibrium included 11) making faculty assignments and 12) deciding on new building facilities. (See table three.) Even on these last two decisional situations, at least 50% of the teachers reported decisional equilibrium.[22]

Belasco and Alutto (1972) attempted to compare decisional discrepancy state with teacher satisfaction. Satisfaction was defined as "willingness to remain within the current school

organization despite inducement to leave."[23] Inducements included a slight increase in pay, a slight increase in status, a position allowing slightly more creativity, and a position in which individuals were slightly more friendly.[24] From the results of their study they concluded that "those teachers who are decisonally deprived report significantly lower satisfaction levels."[25]

Their definition of "satisfaction" may not be valid. It fails to take into account such variables as tenure, security, and convenience. Many teachers may be afraid to switch schools because, although they may be dissatisfied with their school organization, they fear for the unknown, even if it is described as being slightly better. Many teachers develop their own niche where they work and do not want to have to develop a new niche nor enter a situation where they are low in seniority. Some teachers may live near their job and want to continue to work near home.

In 1973, Alutto and Belasco published a research article which compared decisional discrepancy state with "organizational committment" as well as other variables. Their definition of "organizational committment" was the same definition that they operationalized as "satisfaction" in their previous research. For the same reasons as stated above for "satisfaction", their definition of "organizational committment" may not be valid. Furhtermore, the results obtained in the "organizational committment" study contradicted the results of the "satisfaction" study. Alutto Belasco found that "degrees of organizational committment were not

differentially distributed among the individuals with varying decisional attributes."[27] They concluded that "the decision to remain with and become a part of a particular school system may be a function of factors other than those associated with the discrepancy between current and preferred participation in organizational decision making."[28]

Whereas past research has assumed a linear relationship between organizational participation and organizational committment,[29] and Belasco and Alutto suggested that "decisional saturation may be the most satisfying decisional state,"[30] Conway found that those in the decisional equilibrium state had the most positive perception of the organization.[31] Conway suggested that "both deprivation and saturation detract from individuals satisfaction with the organization."[32]

Mohrman, Cooke, and Mohrman (1978) divided the twelve decisional situations used in the Alutto and Belasco studies (see table one,) into two domains: 1)Technical; the operational tasks of the school and the teachers, and 2) Managerial; support functions associated with "bureaucracy."[33] Their study found a significant positive relationship between participation in the Technical domain and both extrinsic and intrinsic satisfaction and a negative relationship between participation in the Technical domain and role ambiguity. Participation in the Managerial domain was not related to any of the affective measures.[34]

Mohrman et. al. indicated that the finding that satisfaction and role ambiguity felt by teachers were associated with only their participation in Technical domain decisions was obscured

when the twelve decisional areas were combined into a global measure of decisional participation.[35] They concluded that "teacher satisfaction is not simply related to the degree to which they participate but also to the type of decisions in which they participate."[36]

The Technical domain decisions tend to have greater relevance to the classroom teacher than do Managerial domain decisions. Whannell (1976) found that "teachers generally do not wish to be heavily involved in decision making not directly concerned with the teacher-student-subject situation."[37] Furthermore, Bridges (1969) has postulated that "when the teacher's personal stakes in the decision are high, their interest in participation should also be high."[38]

Bridges has suggested that the principal should seek teacher involvement in decision making when the decisional situation is relevant to the teachers, the teachers involved possess a high level of expertise in the situation, it is necesarry to reach a higher-quality decision, and acceptance is required for that decision's outcome to be implemented effectively.[39]

Bridges has pointed to the importance of the role of the principal in determining the involvement of teachers in the decision making process. He set forth the proposition that "as the principal involves teachers in making decisions located in their 'zone of indifference', participation will be less effective" than when the decisions are located outside their 'zone of indifference.'[40]

Bridges discusses three "constitutional arrangements" for teacher participation in decision making: participant-determining, where every group member has relatively equal power

over the decision and consensus is required; parlimentarian, where every group member has relatively equal power over the decision and the choice is binding on the group whenever the majority agrees on a particular course of action; and democratic-centralist, where the "group is bound by a decision whenever one is reached by the person in final authority."[41] Bridges suggested that the participant-determining mode seems appropriate for those decision areas which fall outside of the teachers' zone of acceptance, but cautioned that reaching consensus is very time consuming.[42]

Wickstom (1979) suggested that "the involvement of many persons is appropriate when a problem is ill defined, with quality difficult to measure and accuracy of information uncertain."[43]

Recently, many school districts have experimented with the utilization of teachers in the decision making process. They believed that teacher participation in decision making could prove to be beneficial. Some of these programs have advocated very high degrees of teacher participation. However, Abbott (1974) cautioned that "on many occassions decisions must be

made unilaterally without the direct involvement of organizational subordinates. Sometimes this need arises because of the urgency for action. At other times, the decision to be made is of little interest to employees. On still other occassions the decisions are of such overriding importance to the organization that they must be made from a managerial perspective even at the risk of lowering the morale of organizational subordinates."44

The literature is filled with anecdotal accounts of school sysyems that have experimented with teacher paticipation in the school's decision making process.

Empirical research was conducted in a Quebec school system, where school councils were set up in each school. Teachers could volunteer to serve as a school council member and thereby participate in school decision making.[45] It would seem then that these teachers would become in a state of decisional equilibrium. If they were overburdened as a result of their decision involvement they could quit.

Correlation coefficients of the Quebec secondary schools indicated "overwhelming consensus among principals, school council members, and teachers on which items and the extent to which those items should or should not be considered by the school council."[46]

Moyle (1979) reported that the leadership of the principal is a crucial factor in the functioning of a "cabinet-type" Instructional Improvement Committee.[47] Crockenberg and Clark (1979) reported that as relations between teachers and administrators becamed strained (as a result of the policy implications of Proposition 13 in California,) administrator's support for the San Jose Teacher Improvement Project dissipated.[48]

Flynn (1976) reported that since teachers in his school have become involved in the decisions concerning the school budget, "each department now understands and supports the allocation for every other department."[49] Flynn also reported

that as it became acceptable to raise conflict for the purpose of dealing with it, they have found more conflict to deal with and this has become a very time-consuming effort.[50] Griffith has also stated that time is a major deterrent to teachers who might otherwise wish to participate in school decision making.[51]

Duke, Showers, and Imber (1980) sought to investigate teachers' perceptions of the costs and benefits of involvement in school decision making.[52] Duke et. al. presented teachers with five potential costs of decision making participation and asked the teachers to rate how much of a deterrent these were to their becoming involved in school decision making. The potential costs presented were increased time demands, loss of autonomy, risk of collegial disfavor, subversion of the collective bargaining process, and threats to career advancement.[53] Only increased time demands was rated as a substantial deterrent to decisional participation for teachers.

Three potential benefits of involvement in school decision making were presented and all three were rated as substantial benefits for teachers. These three benefits were feelings of self-efficacy, a feeling of shared ownership, and having a workplace democracy.[54]

However, the teachers in this San Francisco school district who did participate in making school decisions did not report much satisfaction in doing so because they believed that they had no real influence.[55]

Most of the anecdotal reports seem to indicate that teacher participation in decision making has worked relatively well for all concerned despite some minor difficulties.

Although the research findings reported in this paper were at times contradictory, some general conclusion about teacher participation can be drawn. First, teachers are not homogeneous in their preference for participation in school decision making. Many teachers feel decisionally deprived; relatively few feel decisionally saturated. The relationship between decisional discrepancy state and satisfaction appears to be curvilinear with equilibrium as the most desireable state.

The type of decision to be made is an important factor in determining whether teachers want to becomeinvolved in the decision making process and whether they will derive satisfaction from the experience. Teachers tend to desire involvement in the decisions that are most relevant to them as teachers.

Furthermore, the amount of time and work that will be required of them are major concerns of teachers when considering whether or not to become involved in school decision making.

Finally, the leadership of the principal in shared decision making seems to be important for the success of such involvement.

Footnotes

1. Bridges, E.M., "A Model for Shared Decision Making in the School Principalship," Educational Administration Quarterly, 3, 1967, p51.

2. Crockenberg, V. and Clark, W.W. Jr., "Teacher Participation in School Decision Making: The San Jose Teacher Involvement Project," Phi Delta Kappan, 61, 1979, p 116.

3. Griffith, F., Administrative Theory in Education: Texts and Readings. Michigan: Pendell Publishing Co., 1979, p242.

4. Johansen, J.H., "A Investigation of the Relationships Between Teacher's Perceptions of Authoratative Influences in Local Curriculum Decisin Making and Curriculum Implementation," doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, 1965 in Lipham, J.M. and Hoeh, J.A. Jr., The Principalship: Foundations and Functions, New York: Harper and Row, 1974.

5. Griffith, p242.

6. Keef, J.L., "Teachers 'Restlessness' and Decision Making," The Clearing House, 52, 1979, p411.

7. Mulder, M., "Power Equalization Through Participation?" Administrative Science Quarterly, 16, 1971, 31-39 in Alutto, J.A. and Belasco, J.A., "A Typology for Participation in Organizational Decision-Making," Administrative Science Quarterly, 17, 1972, p117.

8. Griffiths, D.E., Administrative Theory. New York: Appelton-Century-Crofts, 1959, p89.

9. Isherwood, G.F. and Taylor, R.M. "participatory Decision-Making Via School Councils," High School Journal, 61,

10. Isherwood et. al., p269.

11. Griffiths, pp90-91.
Interestingly, Moyle (1979) found that the leadership of the principal was a crucial factor in the functioning of a teacher participatory Instructional Improvement Committee. Moyle, C.R.J., "Principal Leader Behavior and Shared Decision Making, " Journal of Educational Administration, 17, 1979, pp39-50.

12. Keef, p 412.

13. Alutto, J.A. and Belasco, J.A. "A Typology for Participation in Organizational Decision-Making," Administrative Science Quarterly, 17, 1972, 117-125.

14. The authors stated that this categorization "provides an indication of a teacher's sense of distributive justice concerning his or her participation in organizational decision making." Belasco, J.A. and Alutto, J.A., "Decisional Participation and Teacher's Satisfaction," Educational Administration Quarterly, 8, 1972, p46.

15. Alutto and Belasco, p123.

16. Conway, J.A. "Test of Linearity Between Teacher's Participation in Decision Making and Their Perceptions of Their School as Organizations," Administrative Science Quarterly, 21, 1976, p130.

17. Conway, p134.

18. Conway, p136.

19. Best, J.K. "A Means of Measuring Teacher Participation in Decision-Making," The Clearing House, 49, 1975, 26-27.

20. Best, pp26-27. These results may be specific to the one school district studied.

21. These decisional situations were almost identical to those used by Alutto and Belasco (1972.)

22. Best, p 27.

23. Belasco and Alutto, p48.

24. Belasco and Alutto, p48.

25. Belasco and Alutto, p51.

26. Alutto, J.A. and Belasco, J.A. "Patterns of Teacher Participation in School System Decision Making," Educational Administration Quarterly, 9, 1973,27-41.

27. Alutto and Belasco (1973), p34.

28. Alutto and Belasco (1973), p39. The authors did not attempt to explain why their previous research findings were contradicted in this study even though the major variables were the same.

29. Alutto and Belasco (1973), p 27.

30. Alutto and Belasco (1972), p 52.

31. Conway, p138.

32. Conway, p138.

33. Mohrman, A.M Jr.; Cooke, R.A.; and Mohrman, S.A. "Participation in Decision Making: A Multidimensional Perspective," Educational Administration Quarterly, 14, 1978, p17.

34. Mohrman et. al., p22.

35. Mohrman et. al., p25.

36. Mohrman et. al., p26. It is interesting to compare this conclusion with the results found on table three of this report.

37. Whannell, R.A. "Participative Decision Making in Queensland State High Schools," Administrative Bulletin, 7, 1976, p1.

38. Bridges, p52.

39. Bridges, p52. Hoy and Miskel also indicate the importance of teacher involvement in decisions that fall outside of the teachers zone of acceptance. Hoy, W.K. and Miskel, C.G., Educational Administration: Theory, Research, and Practice, New York: Random House, 1978, pp227-235.

40. Bridges, p51.

41. Bridges, p55.

42. Bridges, p56.

43. Wickstrom, R.A. "Participation Revisited: Who Decides When and How Much?" Canadian Administrator, 19, 1979, p 1.

44. Abbott, M.G. in Lipham anf Hoeh, p171.

45. Isherwood et. al. point out that teachers "who volunteer for the school council are not necessarily representative of the entire staff." p257.

46. The correlation coefficients for the extent to which items should be considered were: .72 between principals and teachers, .69 between principals and council members, and .94 between council members and teachers. Isherwood et. al. concluded that this last correlation indicates that council members do adequately represent thei fellow teachers, p265.

47. Moyle, pp39-50.

48. Crockenberg et. al., p118.

49. Flynn, W.C. "Collaborative Decision-Making in a Secondary School: An experiment," Education and Urban Society, 8, 1976, p176.

50. Flynn, p178.

51. Griffith, p243.

52. Duke, D.L.; Showers, B.K.; and Imber, M. "Teachers and Shared Decision Making: the Costs and Benefits of Involvement," Educational Administration Quarterly, 16, 1980, 93-106.

53. Duke et. al., p 95.

54. Duke et. al., pp 102-103.

55. Duke et. al., p104.

Table 1

Decisional Situations

1. Hiring new faculty members.
2. Selecting specific instructional texts.
3. Resolving learning problems of individual students.
4. Determining appropriate instructional methods and techniques.
5. Establishing general instructional policies.
6. Establishing classroom disciplinary policies.
7. Planning school budgets.
8. Determining specific faculty assignments.
9. Resolving faculty member grievances.
10. Planning new buildings and facilities.
11. Resolving problems with community groups.
12. Determining faculty salaries.

Taken from Alutto, J.A. and Belasco, J.A., "A Typology for Participation in Organizational Decision-Making," Administrative Science Quarterly, 17, 1972, p119.

Table 2

## FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION IN EACH DECISIONAL SITUATION

| DECISIONAL SITUATION | DEPRIVED | ACTIVE EQUILIBRIUM | SATURATED | PASSIVE EQUILIBRIUM | TOTAL EQUILIBRIUM | PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL EQUILIBRIUM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Faculty Hiring | 74 | 49 | 0 | 59 | 108 | 59.34 |
| 2. Budgets | 50 | 107 | 4 | 21 | 128 | 70.32 |
| 3. Textbooks | 15 | 160 | 1 | 6 | 166 | 91.20 |
| 4. Student Problems | 24 | 144 | 4 | 10 | 154 | 84.61 |
| 5. Faculty Assignments | 85 | 52 | 0 | 45 | 97 | 53.29 |
| 6. Grievances | 58 | 27 | 1 | 96 | 123 | 67.58 |
| 7. Instructional Methods | 77 | 97 | 2 | 6 | 103 | 56.59 |
| 8. Building Facilities | 89 | 59 | 2 | 32 | 91 | 50.00 |
| 9. Community Problems | 51 | 42 | 4 | 85 | 127 | 69.78 |
| 10. Administrative Services | 42 | 15 | 1 | 124 | 139 | 76.37 |
| 11. Salaries | 62 | 49 | 4 | 67 | 116 | 63.73 |
| 12. General Instructional Policies | 61 | 104 | 2 | 15 | 119 | 65.38 |

Taken from Best, J.K. "A Means of Measuring Teacher Participation in Decision-Making," The Clearing House, 49, 1975, p27.

Table 3

## RANK AND PERCENTAGE OF TEACHER EQUILIBRIUM

| RANK | | PERCENTAGE |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Making textbook selection | 91.20 |
| 2. | Resolving students' academic or personal problems | 84.61 |
| 3. | Resolving problems with administrative services (e.g., clerks, typists) | 76.37 |
| 4. | Preparing school or departmental budgets | 70.32 |
| 5. | Resolving difficulties with community groups | 69.78 |
| 6. | Resolving grievances | 67.58 |
| 7. | Establishing general instructional policy | 65.38 |
| 8. | Deciding faculty members' salaries | 63.73 |
| 9. | Hiring new faculty members | 59.34 |
| 10. | Adopting new instructional methods | 56.59 |
| 11. | Making faculty assignments | 53.29 |
| 12. | Deciding on new building facilities | 50.00 |

Taken from Best, J.K. "A Means of Measuring Teacher Participation in Decision-Making," The Clearing House, 49, 1975, p27.

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